Why Tyrants Go Too Far: Malignant Narcissism and Absolute Power

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This article explores the puzzling behavior of tyrants who undermine themselves once in power. The realpolitik *perspective and a variety of psychological frameworks are used to try to resolve this puzzle in the cases of several ancient and three contemporary tyrants. Although all the frameworks used have explanatory power, the one that most closely fits the tyrants studied here is that of the narcissist with severe superego deficiencies. An individual with such psychological characteristics may have some advantages in rising to power, and his behavior may be an effective response to some real-life factors, but once he has consolidated his position his reality-testing capacities diminish. Fantasies held in check when his power is limited are apt to become his guides to action. As a consequence, his behavior becomes more erratic, he runs into difficulties in meeting his goals, and his paranoid defenses become more exaggerated. The finale of a tyrant's career depends on the particulars of his political and social situation.*

> But 'tis a common proof,
> That lowliness is young ambition's ladder,
> Whereto the climber-upward turns his face:
> But when he once attains the upmost round,
> He then unto the ladder turns his back,
> Looks in the clouds, scorning the base degrees,
> By which he did ascend.
> <div align="right">William Shakespeare, Julius Caesar, Act II, Sc. i, ll. 21–27</div>

Our focus in this article is on the paradoxical behavior of the tyrant. His grandiosity and his skills in deception, manipulation, and intimidation are an advantage to him in securing power. But as he moves toward absolute power, he is also apt to cross moral and geographic boundaries in ways that place him in a

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vulnerable position. Thus, he may engage in cruelties that serve no political purpose, challenge the conventional morality in ways that undermine his base, engage in faulty reality testing, and overreach himself in foreign engagements in ways that invite new challenges to his rule. If this turns out to be the pattern of his behavior, why and how does it evolve?

For the purpose of this study, in conformity with the analyses offered by Plato and Aristotle, the tyrant is defined as one who (1) rules without law, (2) looks to his own advantage rather than that of his subjects, and (3) uses extreme and cruel tactics—against his own people as well as others.[1] As Aristotle noted, the tyrant is one who cuts off the heads of those who are too high, undertakes measures to sow discord among subjects, impoverishes people with his exploits, and uses informers and betrayers to undermine trust among his subjects (Aristotle, 1948, pp. 132, 158, 212, 287; Plato, 1941, pp. 26–27, 325). The problem, as Plato recognized in *The Republic* (1941, pp. 26–27, 325–327, 330–332), resides in the tyrant's character and the ways in which he exercises power. Lacking concern for elementary considerations of justice, he needlessly creates enemies and sets himself on a path that leads to increasingly chaotic behavior on his part. In short, the tyrant is one who seeks and exercises powers for his own rather than the general interest, does it outside the law, and creates a political order based on extreme cruelties and mistrust.

The cases for this study were initially drawn from the essay on tyranny in Mortimer Adler's *Syntopicon* (1952, pp. 139–156)—the guide to the University of Chicago's Great Books of the Western World series. With a list composed of tyrants from that source, the works of Herodotus, Plutarch, Plato, Aristotle, and Gibbon were consulted to see what common characteristics might exist in all these men. This survey suggested that practically all such individuals were inclined to be grandiose, insecure, extraordinarily cruel, and eventually subject to flawed reality testing.

Three major 20th-century tyrants—men who engaged in lawless behavior and placed their own interests above that of their polities—were then subjected to more detailed observation to see whether their personal characteristics matched those listed above. Hitler, Stalin, and Saddam Hussein indeed showed the grandiosity, the underlying insecurity, the cruelty, and the ultimately flawed reality testing noted by observers of the tyrants of antiquity.[2]

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[1] In her analysis of Sophocles' *Oedipus*, Saxonhouse (1988) identified tyranny with the ruler who comes to power in the city by means other than birth or precedents recognized as legitimate. This freedom from the past, she argued, parallels the Greek idea of reason, with its implication that it entails a breaking away from the physical world. We agree with Saxonhouse that this identification of tyranny with a disrespect for tradition is a manifestation of tyranny. But Aristotle and Plato equate tyranny with the *lack of reason*. The tyrant is not only the ruler that put his own interests above the polity, he is ungoverned by reason in his own soul (see Plato, 1941, pp. 330–332).

[2] Given this definition of the tyrant, 20th-century revolutionary leaders such as Kemal Ataturk—who had genuine commitments to reform and were limited in the cruelties they imposed on their own people—are excluded from the analysis. Pol Pot, Mao Zedong, Nikolai Ceausescu, and Idi Amin and

Next, a series of explanatory models was applied to these tyrants' behavior to see which model was the most comprehensive. The first is Machiavelli's *realpolitik* explanation—that a tyrant is simply a person who can do whatever is necessary to gain and maintain himself in power under difficult conditions. In short, his personality is infinitely malleable. Some difficulties with this perspective are noted, including Machiavelli's suggestion that the personality of the tyrant often gets in the way of his doing what is best for the maintenance of his power.

Scholars who have attempted to delineate the behavioral patterns of actual tyrants include Robert Waite (1977), Vamik Volkan (1988), Robert Tucker (1990), Jerrold Post (1991, 1993), and D. Jablow Hershman and Julian Lieb (1994). Their psychological models variously depend on the explanatory power of Karen Horney's theory of neurosis, the manic-depressive syndrome, the borderline personality, and some of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) typologies. Each model has some value with respect to explaining the records of the three tyrants, but each also has limits. We conclude that the malignant narcissism syndrome provides the most complete description of the basic character structure of the tyrant (see Post, 1993, for similar views).

However, classification systems developed via clinical experience with persons who have been diagnosed as dysfunctional may need further elaboration for major political leaders. To understand the tyrant, we need to investigate the careers of individuals who have been successful in gaining absolute power in a broader political environment. Building on the work of Robins and Post (1997), we provide a basis for delineating, in a systematic manner, the advantages a malignant narcissist has in securing power in a chaotic or otherwise difficult situation. As discussed below, the attainment of nearly absolute power in the real world serves him while at the same time contributing to the psychological deterioration and behavioral overshooting that may lead to his eventual political undoing.

As is the case for any complex theory in the social sciences, the proof of such an assertion depends on the discovery of patterns. The test of congruence—as Alexander George and Timothy McKeown (1985) have suggested—depends on the discovery of a theoretical framework that enables us to tie together otherwise unrelated traits or characteristics in a way that suggests some underlying coherence and/or causal mechanisms linking these traits. If we can better understand several

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other African dictators seem to fit the definition used here, but they were not considered because of limited space or insufficient biographical data to analyze their personalities in detail. However, a preliminary survey of the biographies of these possible tyrants suggests that most of them shared the traits of grandiosity, defensiveness, and the capacity for cruelty when needed. Whether they also manifested the kinds of sadism, splitting, and personal disintegration under stress noted here remains to be seen. See Decalo (1989) on African dictators; Ratchnevsky (1992) on Genghis Khan; Lifton (1968), Pye (1976; 1996) Terrill (1980), and Li (1994) on Mao; and Thompson (1988) and Schom (1997) on Napoleon. Some more general works delineate the characteristics of specific tyrants without developing in a systematic way the dynamics of how the attainment of near-absolute power can lead to the disintegration of the personality of the tyrant. See Boesche (1996), Blumberg (1995), Byschowski (1948), Carlton (1995), Chirot (1994), and Tormey (1995).

different tyrants via such a framework, we have further proof. Of course, confidence in a given explanation will be the greatest when many independent sources converge on the same solution through the process of triangulation. This process is very similar to the process of consilience that Charles Darwin relied on in his work. The theory of evolution was built on such a process. No other explanation could coordinate the disparate data from embryology, the fossil record, vestigial organs, taxonomic relationships, and other such sources (Gould, 1989, p. 282). In short, evolution theory tied together, in an economic way that did not contradict the larger body of scientific knowledge, the diverse and abundant material Darwin was trying to understand.

This study was kept manageable by limiting its scope in several ways. The impact of technology on how the tyrant exercises power is dealt with only in passing.[3] The broader situational factors that influence the ability of a tyrant to gain power are addressed only in the discussion of how the tyrant's characteristics enable him to gain and maintain power in extreme or new situations.[4] We also should note that a tyrant who engages in self-destructive behavior may do so under various constraints. The consequences of such behavior will depend on the extent to which his power has been solidified, the continued existence of powerful others who might oppose and defeat him in his field of operations, and the vicissitudes of fortune.

Before proceeding, we must consider the view that the successful tyrant is too complex to be understood in terms of any extant models of pathological behavior, and that such models somehow exempt him from moral analysis. This view has been expressed in several recent studies of Hitler. John Lukacs, in *The Hitler of History* (1997), argued that to find Hitler "mad" is to relieve him of all responsibility for what he did (p. 43). Ron Rosenbaum (1998), in his review of the many different "explanations" of Hitler, caricatured the psychological explanations of him as simplistic portraits, presenting him as an overzealous serial killer, a "workaholic Hannibal Lecter" who is "the victim of a dysfunctional family." As with Lukacs, Rosenbaum's final explanation is that Hitler was simply an evil genius (1998, pp. xxix, 394). Ian Kershaw took another tack, simply downplaying the significance of Hitler's personality, saying that a successful study of the man must

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3 Some tyrants of the past (e.g., Genghis Khan; see Ratchnevsky, 1992) have been able to engage in mass destruction. Modern technologies, however, permit the tyrant to be much more efficient in destroying his enemies, as in Hitler's "Final Solution" to the Jewish problem. Modern communication systems also give him an advantage in using propaganda and controlling the populations he has conquered (as in the control of the mass media and the entire educational system by the Nazi Party in Germany and Stalin's Communist Party in the Soviet Union).

4 Contemporary experience with Hitler and Stalin suggests that a tyrant is most apt to gain power in situations where there is a widespread sense of resentment or grievance based on historical or social events. Niccolo Machiavelli went further, suggesting in *The Prince* (1966, pp. 59–60) that any creator of a new state, as contrasted to one who comes to power legitimately and rules over an established polity, may have to act like a tyrant for a while.

also be a study of German society and how it made Hitler and the Nazi era possible (Kershaw, 1998, pp. xii, xxvii).

To say that a person has a personality disorder, however, does not rule out moral evaluations, as Lukacs and Rosenbaum seem to suggest. Even a person as repellent as Hitler can be examined in terms of his psychological pathologies without forfeiting a firm condemnation of his actions and their consequences. Whether or not he acted out his evil impulses from a "free choice" or as an expression of a sort of basic character disorder does not prevent us from judging what he was and what he did. Nor does an analysis of the contribution of the tyrant's personality to his conquest of the political heights negate the contribution of the situation to his initial success. An overview of the argument that follows is presented in Figure 1.
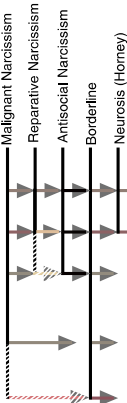
The Paradox of the Tyrant

The grandiosity of tyrants is evident in several rulers of antiquity. The Persian King Cyrus, who undertook his final ill-fated expedition against the Massagetae thinking himself more than human, viewed his past good fortune in battle as a sign of what was yet to come (Herodotus, 1987, pp. 126–130). Xerxes, before undertaking his campaign against Athens, also saw himself as the embodiment of the divine (Herodotus, 1987, p. 477).

Among contemporary tyrants, Stalin portrayed himself as the creator of the industrial and military might of the new communist order and of the "new Soviet man." His pronouncements assumed scriptural authority, and sycophantic adulation and glorification became the norm. In addition, Stalin presented himself as the fount of wisdom. In *The Foundations of Leninism*, a series of lectures printed in 1924, he portrayed himself as the successor to Marx, Engels, and Lenin as a Marxist philosopher (Tucker, 1973, pp. 316–324). Stalin also claimed expertise in a variety of fields where he actually had no training, such as economics, biology, physics, and especially military science (Conquest, 1991, pp. 193–194).

Hitler envisaged himself as the creator of a whole new Germanic civilization—the Third Reich. But unlike Stalin, his grandiosity was more personalized, and he had no modesty about proclaiming his own superiority as a *sui generis* genius. He once compared himself to Jesus, saying that he would complete "what Christ began." After the surrender of Czechoslovakia in 1939, he proclaimed himself as "the greatest German in history" (Fest, 1974, p. 572). Even his escapes from potential disasters were signs of his chosen role. Euphoric after a failed assassination attempt in 1939, Hitler said that his escape was evidence that "Providence intends to allow me to reach my goal!" (Bullock, 1992, p. 642). He saw the failure of the 20 July 1944 assassination plot as "new proof" that he had been selected for greatness by Providence. Leading a horrified Mussolini to the conference room where the bomb had gone off, Hitler in an exultant mood proudly showed off his burns and shredded uniform. His escape, he said, was miraculous, the proof that

Psychological Syndromes
(dotted lines represent probable but
not always present characteristic)

Malignant Narcissism
Reparative Narcissism
Antisocial Narcissism
Borderline
Neurosis (Horney)

Psychological Traits	**Behavioral Manifestations in the Tyrant**
1. Grandiose self image, proclivities toward fantasy.	1. Grandiose self-presentations and projects.
2. Underlying feelings of inferiority and defensiveness.	2. Use of power to support grandiose image and curtail negative feedback.*
3. Deficient super-ego development; deficient grounding in shared values and genuine human relationships.*	3. Ruthless behavior; ease in the employment of antisocial and cruel tactics as needed.
4. Paranoia (splitting and projection upon an enemy) as a major defense.	4. Aggression vs. an external and/or domestic "enemy."
5. Poor impulse control.	5. Erratic behavior, contradictory orders.

Power and the Malignant Narcissist: Interactive Effects

1. Grandiosity and ability to employ antisocial tactics provide advantages in securing political power in certain situations.

2. Political power used to buttress grandiose self image, defend against external criticism, provide company, bolster splitting and paranoiac defense.

3. But consolidation of absolute power for the malignant narcissist is apt to lead to a vicious cycle:

    a. Orchestrated adulation and friendships feel false.
    b. Grandiose plans lead to rash behavior; this and ruthless political tactics create new enemies, other impediments to success.
    c. Project over-reach and creation of new enemies leads to increasing vulnerability, a deepening of the paranoiac defense, and volatility in behavior.

*The manifestation of the deficient super-ego will diverge between the different typologies. The reparative type will pursue positive goals but also engage in expedient but not malignant behavior to secure his ends; the antisocial type is apt to pursue acts of petty criminality; and the malignant narcissist grand crimes. The manic-depressive typology employed in this work does not lend itself to this diagrammatic presentation.

Figure 1. Paradox of the Tyrant

made it certain he would come through all his difficulties (Schmidt, 1951, pp. 275–276; Waite, 1977, p. 28).

    Not only did Hitler see himself as one of the greatest political leaders of all time, he considered himself an intellectual and creative giant, an expert in virtually every field of endeavor. In 1919 he planned a massive work about the history of mankind, entitled "Monumental History of Humanity," though he had no formal training at all in history (Waite, 1977, p. 247). In 1925, Hitler designed a triumphal arch for the capital of his new "Germania" that would be much larger than the *Arc*

de Triomphe in Paris. In 1942 he said that if the war had not interrupted, he would have become "one of the best architects if not *the* best architect in Germany." During the war he gave nightly lectures on linguistics and literary criticism. Even in early 1945, as the Russians closed in on Berlin, he spent many hours on plans for remaking Linz, the town of his youth, into a city to outshine Vienna. And he exclaimed shortly before his suicide: "What an artist dies in me" (Schramm, 1965, p. 323; Toland, 1976, p. 848; Waite, 1977, p. 64).

Grandiosity has also been evident in Saddam Hussein's career. At one time, posters all over Baghdad showed him as the heir of Hammurabi, the great lawmaker of 18th century B.C. Babylon. Later, the special bricks out of which the reproductions of the ancient buildings of Babylon were made were stamped with the name of Saddam Hussein, just as Nebuchadnezzer, the king of Babylon in the sixth century B.C., had put his name on the buildings of his epoch (Bulloch & Morris, 1991, pp. 42–45; Miller & Mylroie, 1990, pp. 57–58). At the celebration of his birthday in his hometown of Tikrit in 1990, another resemblance was suggested by a tableau marking the career of Sargon, the ruler of the first great state to arise in the Tigris-Euphrates valley. This implied that Saddam Hussein was, in some sense, his successor. In a letter he sent to President Mubarak of Egypt 3 weeks after the invasion of Kuwait, he claimed to belong to a noble family descended from the prophet Kuraishi Mohamedan family (Bulloch & Morris, 1991, pp. 44–45). Despite a complete lack of military training, Saddam Hussein also saw himself as having military talent. In the early phases of his war with Iran, he was directly in charge of the actual disposition of his troops in battle. As any amateur might do, he made many mistakes. But he gave way to the professional military commanders only after they confronted him as a group after several defeats (Bulloch & Morris, 1991, p. 43; Miller & Mylroie, 1990, p. 120).

If we look more closely at the tyrant, we see that his grandiosity and the consequent limited reality testing are apt to lead him into behavior that turns out to be self-defeating. Tyrants may tempt fate by challenging the fundamental morality of the people they govern. Or they may surround themselves with persons who have motivations to kill them, or undertake reckless adventures. Thus, Cheops of Egypt turned his daughter to prostitution and shut down the temples (Herodotus, 1987, pp. 185–187). Cambyses I of Persia decided to invade Ethiopia without so much as taking stock of what provisions his troops would require for such a substantial journey. No one dared challenge him. He also undertook unholy acts when he exhumed the body of the deceased Egyptian king Amasis, scourged his body, and ordered it burned (Herodotus, 1987, pp. 217–218, 221–222). Astyages of Medea invited his counselor Harpagus to a banquet, and served him his own son (Harpagus') to eat. Then he appointed Harpagus as his general to oppose the invading army of Persians. No wonder that Harpagus joined Cyrus the Great against his former tormentor (Herodotus, 1987, pp. 89–94). Even Machiavelli noted that Cesare Borgia, despite his genius at deception, cruelty, and political maneuvering, allowed the election of Julius II to the papacy, although he had done Julius II injury.

It was an error to allow any cardinal who had cause to hate or fear him to be elected to the papacy (Machiavelli, 1966, p. 34).

Contemporary tyrants provide us with even more detailed confirmation of these proclivities. Stalin's tendency for overreaching was manifested even when he was still climbing to power. On one occasion, when Lenin still had some authority, Stalin telephoned Lenin's wife N. K. Krupskaya, cursing and threatening her in vile language (Tucker, 1973, pp. 268–271). Stalin's potentially self-defeating behaviors are even more evident when his decisions in the years leading up to the German invasion of Russia are considered. His massive purges of the officer corps during 1937 and 1938 left a severely demoralized and disorganized military to face the Germans. When the Soviet-German pact was signed, Stalin thought he had "tricked" Hitler (Tucker, 1990, p. 619). He naïvely ignored Hitler's writing in *Mein Kampf* (Hitler, 1939, pp. 950–952, 959, 961) that alliances are only to be used to weaken the enemy, and that Russia must be destroyed. In 1941 Stalin rejected all messages from Soviet intelligence, his military commanders, Winston Churchill, and even the German ambassador in Moscow, suggesting that Hitler was planning to attack Russia. For him the warnings were just "dis-information" or "clumsy fabrications." Accepting specious German explanations of their military buildups before the invasion, he allowed German reconnaissance flights over Russia. He even substantially weakened Russia's defenses in the spring of 1941 by ordering the partial dismantling of an extensive line of fortified positions on Russia's eastern border (in anticipation of building a replacement further west along the new borders in Poland, but only over several years). When Hitler struck, Stalin remained in complete seclusion for a week, just when his presence and leadership were most critical for Russia (Tucker, 1990, pp. 619, 622, 625).

Stalin's refusal to face realistic danger to his position is also indicated in his tolerance, during and after the Second World War, of the rising power and influence of KGB head Lavrenti Beria. Beria, who had engaged in many of Stalin's most egregious actions, surrounded Stalin with a staff composed of his own people. The actual treacherousness of the KGB chief is made clear by his behavior during Stalin's final illness. As Stalin lay dying, Beria began to deride and abuse him. However, when Stalin showed signs of regaining consciousness, Beria fell to his knees and started kissing his hand. When Stalin slipped back into his coma, Beria stood up and spat on Stalin (Khrushchev, 1970, pp. 310–311, 318). Stalin's daughter Svetlana Alliluyeva found Beria's behavior at Stalin's deathbed "nearly obscene," his face reflecting his intense ambition and ruthlessness (Alliluyeva, 1967, pp. 7, 11).

Hitler also displayed what seems to be self-defeating behavior early in his career. His Munich putsch of 1923 was both premature and handled with considerable ineptitude. Once the putsch had failed and he was in prison, Hitler refused to eat for 2 weeks, believing that he deserved to die because of his failure (Gordon, 1972, pp. 332–336; Schwaab, 1992, pp. 30, 129). Hitler's propensity for self-defeating behavior was even more evident in some of his decisions in key phases

of the Second World War. During the invasion of France in May 1940, he suddenly stopped the rapid advance of his armored columns for 2 days, allowing the demoralized French forces a chance to recover and counterattack. Then, at Dunkirk, he inexplicably stopped all tank operations in the area just when the surrender or destruction of the bottled-up British expeditionary force in Europe seemed inevitable. Hitler seemed unconcerned, even lethargic, about the British evacuation from Dunkirk, even as his commanders desperately tried to devise ways to block it (Toland, 1976, pp. 609–611; Waite, 1977, pp. 397–398).

Hitler's decision to open up a second front with Russia, even after the disastrous experience of Napoleon, with whom he had identified himself, was his most significant mistake. Even the very code-name "Operation Barbarossa"— assigned by Hitler personally—recalls Barbarossa's failures in his military campaigns. Hitler also set the date of the invasion for 22 June, the traditional anniversary of Napoleon's embarking on his ill-fated invasion of Russia. In planning the invasion, Hitler made some serious military errors. At the beginning of the Russian campaign, he divided his forces against his generals' wishes, thus making the capture of Moscow less likely. And it was on Hitler's orders that no winter gear was issued to German troops, severely impairing their effectiveness as the campaign extended into the winter (Fest, 1974, pp. 653–654; Whaley, 1973, pp. 16–21). Furthermore, Hitler's obsession about the Jews was ironically a factor in Germany's defeat. The logistics of carrying out the "Final Solution" impaired the German war effort, and Hitler's distrust of "Jewish physics" impeded attempts to develop the atomic bomb. (For administrative and economic costs of the "Final Solution," see Hilberg, 1961, pp. 643–646; Speer, 1970, p. 228.)

At a more personal level Hitler also engaged in self-destructive acts. He chose Dr. Theo Morell as his physician at the end of 1936 for his various ailments, even though Morell was clearly incompetent in some respects. Morell heavily overdosed Hitler with pills containing strychnine and atropine for his indigestion and stomach pains. Even when this was discovered, Morell continued for some time to be the only doctor allowed to attend to Hitler (Toland, 1976, pp. 824–827).

Saddam Hussein has also engaged in apparently self-destructive acts. One week after his troops entered Iran in 1980, at a time when they were meeting little resistance, Saddam Hussein halted their advance (Wiskari, 1980). The order gave the Iranian army time to reorganize and regroup. The result was an 8-year war that provided Iraq with no major territorial gains while draining the country's resources. To settle his border conflicts with Kuwait in 1990, Hussein opted not to attempt to correct the problems at hand, which he might have accomplished without provoking U.S. intervention, but to conquer and then annex all of Kuwait. Through his greed, he left his intentions about an invasion of Saudi Arabia deliberately ambiguous and openly threatened the oil supplies of the entire Western world. With such actions he made a countervailing reaction very likely.

What we see, in short, is a tendency for the tyrant to overreach in his designs for aggrandizement, to have lapses of judgment in terms of those he trusts and

distrusts, and to suffer paralysis at key moments when the inevitable reverses occur. The problem is to fit such self-defeating tendencies within the framework of an overall model, political or psychological, of the tyrant's behavior and personality.

Possible Explanations: The *Realpolitik* Paradigm

The *realpolitik* paradigm provides a partial explanation of the tyrant's behavior. As Machiavelli argued in *The Prince*, the goal of establishing a new regime requires a man with a nature that enables him to be as deceptive and cruel as the situation requires. A newly established ruler, he states, must act as cruelly as necessary to secure himself, and establish a reputation for harshness (Machiavelli, 1966, p. 59).

Certainly in gaining and maintaining power in troubled situations, the would-be tyrant has advantages. His ability to form and shift alliances as his personal advantage dictates, to kill and thus permanently eliminate actual and potential enemies, to establish spy networks, to ferret out opposition and undermine the trust between citizens that might cause them to organize a rebellion against him—all these give such individuals tactical advantages in the raw struggle for power.

We have evidence along these lines in the "genius" of three contemporary tyrants. During his early years as a revolutionary in Tiflis and Batum, Georgia, Stalin continually maneuvered to undermine local party leaders and increase his power (Hershman & Lieb, 1994, p. 89). In his final ascent to power, Stalin's detachment from any particular ideological positions within the broader framework of Marxist philosophy enabled him to maneuver so as to eliminate all rivals in the Party Politburo. By aligning himself in the mid-1920s with the Leningrad faction led by Lev Kamenev and Grigori Zinoviev and the Moscow group led by Nikolai Bukharin, he first defeated Leon Trotsky and his supporters. Then, with Bukharin's help, Stalin turned against Kamenev and Zinoviev. Finally, he moved against the remaining Bukharin faction, and by late 1929 had destroyed it (Tucker, 1973, pp. 299–302). In the late 1920s and 1930s he moved to annihilate anyone who could find a power base from which to challenge him. Some were executed after show trials (Kamenev, Zinoviev, and Bukharin), while others were assassinated (Sergei Kirov, probably, and Leon Trotsky). By the late 1930s the old Bolsheviks and later leaders were almost completely eliminated (Tucker, 1990, pp. 291, 373, 500, 526–527, 613). Seventy percent of the Communist Party's Central Committee were dead, half of the party's membership was arrested, and more than a million members had been killed (Conquest, 1991, p. 207). As late as 1948, Andrei Zhdanov, Stalin's then heir-apparent, was poisoned when he fell out of favor, although his death was officially described as a heart attack (Hershman & Lieb, 1994, p. 132).

Stalin also purged the military, especially its upper ranks. In May 1937, Mikhail Tukhachevsky, a former Red Army chief-of-staff, and other top military commanders were arrested on charges of plotting to overthrow the Soviet government, and

tortured into confessing to conspiracy. By 12 November 1938, more than 3,000 naval commanders and 38,679 army personnel had been executed. Those victimized included three of the five marshals, three army commanders out of four, one first-rank army commissar, two first-rank fleet commanders, all 15 second-rank army commanders, more than 200 commanders of other major units, and others of comparable rank (Tucker, 1990, pp. 435, 438, 514).

Hitler also exterminated competitors, most of them before they could even think of plotting against him. On the "Night of the Long Knives" in 1934, hundreds of associates and followers in the Storm Troopers or Brown Skirts were killed because they were allegedly plotting a coup. Among the victims were SA leader Ernst Röhm, a close associate and one of the few people Hitler addressed with the intimate pronoun *du*. General von Schleicher, Hitler's predecessor as chancellor, was gunned down with his wife at his home, as was Gregor Strasser, a former associate who had broken with Hitler at the end of 1932. Some of the deaths were gruesome: The acting police chief of Breslau was almost eviscerated with a shotgun (Toland, 1976, pp. 341–344).

Similarly, Saddam Hussein has eliminated all who might challenge his rule. In 1973, as deputy chairman of the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), he played a key role in the mass executions that followed an abortive coup attempt against the chairman of the RCC and himself. Shortly after he achieved supreme power, at least five of Iraq's most influential leaders, including a deputy prime minister, were arrested and tried by a special court composed of members of the ruling RCC. On 8 August 1979, 21 leaders were shot (Howe, 1979b). Hussein also systematically eliminated military heroes who might challenge his preeminence as a military leader. In response to Iraq's near-defeat at Iran's hand in the autumn of 1982, Hussein executed about 300 high-ranking officers—along with a small number of party officials (Karsh & Rautsi, 1991, p. 191).

Stalin, Hitler, and Hussein also established extensive, overlapping spy networks. To both "discover" potential enemies and intimidate those who might otherwise oppose him, Stalin set up the NKVD in July 1934 (incorporating the earlier OGPU) to carry out his terrors and purges (Tucker, 1990, pp. 272–273). Hitler's secret police network, consolidated under the SD (Sicherheitsdienst) in 1931, soon blanketed Germany with thousands of informers, spying on the opponents of the Nazis as well as members and leaders of the Nazi party itself. The Gestapo had its own network of spies, including block wardens who closely monitored those on their block, making weekly visits to each household, and reporting regularly to the SD (Spielvogel, 1992, pp. 104–107). Saddam Hussein's Baath Party Intelligence penetrated all the other intelligence agencies and important institutions in the state. "The result was virtually absolute control by the party of all aspects of Iraqi life" (Al Khalil, 1989, pp. 14–17). Essentially, fear became the bond of his republic. As a European diplomat stationed in Baghdad noted to a *New York Times* reporter, "there is a feeling that at least three million Iraqis are watching the eleven million others" (Miller & Mylroie, 1990, p. 46).

The inadequacy of a *realpolitik* explanation of the tyrant's behavior as described above is suggested by Machiavelli himself, who saw cruelty as a choice that should be rationally crafted to meet the ruler's ends. The ruler, Machiavelli counseled, should proceed with "moderation, prudence, and humanity, avoiding carelessness born of overconfidence and unbearable harshness born of excessive distrust." Cruelty by the ruler is improper when it is resorted to more and more frequently with the passage of time. Those who follow such a course cannot possibly remain in power (Machiavelli, 1966, pp. 38, 60).

Yet the tyrants of history, as Machiavelli's own examples suggest, are not inclined to moderate their cruelty after they have consolidated their power. Rather than merely engaging in rational power-seeking behavior, the tyrant is inclined to indulge in excessive behavior that creates new problems for him.[5] Thus, Antonius Caracalla, the son of Severus, destroyed Alexandria and executed so many people in Rome that its population was significantly reduced. Everybody, even his intimates, began to fear for their lives. Eventually one of his centurions, whose brother he had murdered but whom he had kept as a bodyguard, killed him while he was surrounded by his troops. Commodus, the son and heir of Marcus Aurelius, allowed his soldiers to plunder the populace without restraint. Hated by the people and regarded with contempt by soldiers for his undignified behavior, he was overthrown and murdered. The excessive cruelty of Maximinus (called Maximin in Gibbon) so alienated all that his troops killed him (Gibbon, 1952, vol. 37, p. 76; Machiavelli, 1966, pp. 70–71). Sometimes cruelties take a sexually perverse turn. Pheros, a pharaoh of Egypt, killed at the town of Red Clay all the women whom he found guilty of adultery, including his own wife. The trial by which guilt was determined was the application of the women's urine to the eyes of the blind king: Only the urine of the innocent would restore sight to the king (Herodotus, 1987, p. 176).

Contemporary tyrants too have committed massive slaughters that turned whole populations against them. Stalin's agricultural collectivization drive, begun in the late 1920s, led to millions of deaths via execution, forced labor camps, and the famine of 1932–1933 (Conquest, 1991, pp. 158–159, 163, 207). Hitler's plans for mass extermination included those considered to be inferior Germans, as well as the "Jewish poison" within the German nation. His 1935 project for a comprehensive program of euthanasia was implemented in 1939, and within 5 years some 100,000 who had been deemed "unworthy" were killed (Conway, 1968, pp. 267–272). His plans for the "Final Solution" of the "Jewish problem," developed at the notorious Wannsee conference in January 1942, had resulted by January 1945

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[5] As Daniel Sabia, an expert on Machiavelli at the University of South Carolina, pointed out to me, Machiavelli explicitly recognized the dilemma that a leader's nature may not meet the requirements of the situation. Thus in the *Discourses* (Book 1, chapter 18), he wrote: "it will…be exceedingly rare that a good man should be found willing to employ wicked means to become prince, even though his final object be good; or that a bad man, after having become a prince, should be willing for labor for good ends. . . ."

in the murder of 6 million Jews. Besides Jews, some 40% of the 1 million Gypsies of Europe were gassed to death, and about 4 million Slavic people died as slave laborers for Germany (Toland, 1976, pp. 702–705, 769–772).

Saddam Hussein, in his drive to suppress the Kurds of northern Iraq in 1987 and 1988, resorted to chemical warfare. Thousands were killed, mainly noncombatant civilians, including women and children. Some half a million Kurds were forcibly evicted from their villages, many were held in concentration camp–like conditions, and about 75% of their towns and villages were burned. In the camps the water supply was poisoned (Chirot, 1994, p. 304). In 1996, his two sons-in-law, Saddam Kamel and Hussein Kamel, who had been lured back to Iraq after their defections to Jordan by promises that they would be treated as "ordinary citizens," were murdered in an assault that resulted in the death of several other family members, including two women and their children.[6] His daughters, the defectors' wives, who were separated from them upon their return, have not been seen since the two men were killed (Aburish, 2000, pp. 337–339; Jehl, 1996).[7]

Not only did these tyrants engage in extensive cruelties, they also personally participated in and sadistically enjoyed many of the cruelties for which they are responsible.

Stalin personally ordered and signed tens of thousands of death sentences. On just one day in December 1937, he approved 3,167 death sentences, and then watched a movie (Conquest, 1991, pp. 203, 207). Moreover, he instructed his operatives on the torture of his victims. On his orders Mamiia Orakhelashvili, a former first secretary of the Georgian party, had his eardrums destroyed and his eyes gouged out, with his wife being compelled to watch (Gazarian, 1982; Robins & Post, 1997, p. 271). Stalin also personally attended some of the show trials in the 1930s, sitting in a darkened room and watching the anguish of the accused who had been his comrades and associates (Tucker, 1990, pp. 500–501). Stalin relished their agonies. He laughed immoderately on seeing an imitation of the old Bolshevik leader Grigori Zinoviev being dragged to his execution, making pleas for mercy with obscenities. During the investigation of the imaginary "Doctors' Plot" in the early 1950s, Stalin ordered the offending physicians to be held in chains, beaten very severely again and again, and "ground into a powder" (Hershman & Lieb, 1994, p. 196). One refinement of Stalin's sadistic cruelty was to reassure personally some of his colleagues and subordinates that they were safe, to the extent of toasting their "brotherhood," and then have them arrested shortly afterward, sometimes the very same day (Fromm, 1973, p. 285).

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[6] The defectors showed considerable naiveté in accepting Saddam Hussein's invitation, because it was widely known that they had been debriefed by the CIA for 2 weeks in Amman, Jordan (Aburish, 2000, pp. 337–338).

[7] All three tyrants implicated others in the deaths of those they murdered: for Stalin, see Khrushchev (1970, pp. 260–261) and Tucker (1990, pp. 288–296, 449, 495, 502); for Hitler, see Toland (1976, p. 713); for Hussein, see Miller and Mylroie (1990, pp. 44–45).

Although Hitler more than Stalin seems to have distanced himself from many of his murders, we do have evidence that he took pleasure in some of his cruelties. He would sometimes terrify members of his entourage by pretending displeasure with one of them as a practical joke (Waite, 1977, p. 87). The fate of the plotters of the 20 July 1944 assassination attempt is perhaps the most graphic example of his sadistic cruelty. Following Hitler's specific instructions, eight plotters were taken to the Plötenzee prison after a Soviet-style show trial and hung by piano-wire nooses from meathooks hanging from the ceiling. Their agonized deaths were filmed and shown on a screen the same evening. According to Albert Speer, "Hitler loved the film and had it shown over and over again" (Toland, 1976, p. 818).

Saddam Hussein, according to some accounts, personally tortured individuals at the notorious Palace of the End when the Baath Party was in power in 1963. When the Baathists were ousted after 9 months of rule, all sorts of grisly instruments of torture, including electric wires with pincers, were discovered there (Miller & Mylroie, 1990, pp. 31–32). Saddam Hussein's sadism is more clearly documented in a film of the infamous meeting of party leaders on 22 July 1979. After the secretary of the RCC had confessed to participating in a Syrian plot against Saddam Hussein, the president announced that he would read the list of traitors, each of whom should leave the room when his name was read. He stipulated that "the people whose names I am going to read out should repeat the slogan of the party and leave the hall." In one instance, he announced the first name of one person, and then changed his mind. Throughout, he stopped to puff on his cigar, sometimes relighting it. To further assure the loyalty of the top leadership that remained, he forced those members of the RCC who had not been targeted to join him in the actual executions of the condemned men (Miller & Mylroie, 1990, pp. 44–45; "The Mind of Hussein," 1991).

In short, the *realpolitik* approach does not explain why many tyrants engage in such extensive slaughters as well as the cruelties that they seem to take pleasure in, almost compulsively. Nor does it touch on the tendencies of such men to overreach and engage in self-defeating behavior. To better understand these characteristics, we turn to dynamic psychology.

Psychological Analyses

It is very difficult to talk about a tyrant without making certain psychological assessments. Plato some time ago suggested many of the psychodynamics in the life history of the tyrant. In the dreams of all persons, he noted, the wild beast "goes forth to satisfy his desires; and there is no conceivable folly or crime" he will not commit. A healthy and temperate man, however, "indulges his appetites neither too much nor too little, but just enough to lay them to sleep and to prevent them and their enjoyment and pains from interfering with the higher principle." The tyrant, by way of contrast, acts out these "idle and spendthrift lusts." Once seduced by "all the pleasure of dissolute life," he cannot stop. "At last this lord of the soul,

having Madness for the captain of his guard, breaks out into a frenzy; and if he finds in himself any good opinions or appetites . . . and there is in him any sense of shame remaining . . . to these higher principles, he puts an end . . . until he has purged away temperance and brought in madness to the full" (Plato, 1941, pp. 330–332).

Even authors who have expressed their distrust of psychological analysis often slip into such analysis on an ad hoc basis. Thus, Lukacs (1997) held that there was a "duality" in Hitler that, among other things, resulted in a "conscious intention to obscure . . . elements of his past and . . . present thinking" (p. 46). Rosenbaum (1998) argued that Hitler was a hater, a cynic who laughed when he did his evil deeds (p. 388).[8] For Kershaw (1998), the "overriding element" in Hitler was "his boundless egomania." Moreover, he noted Hitler's narcissism and progressive megalomania; power was his "aphrodisiac," offering the means to overcome the personal and social reverses of his early years (pp. xxvii–xxviii). Even though the psychiatrist Fritz Redlich, in his *Hitler: Diagnosis of a Destructive Prophet*, was reluctant to use any overall psychiatric diagnoses of Hitler, arguing that such diagnoses are imprecise labels leading only to a "false sense of knowledge," he still concluded that Hitler's "core identity" was that of a charismatic prophet, but a destructive and paranoid one (Redlich, 1998, pp. 309, 335–336). Unlike Redlich, we consider the possibility that a psychological model developed in the clinic may tie together, with some modifications, the complex strains of behavior that we see in persons striving for absolute power.

The advantage of using explicit interpretations of the personality structures of various tyrants is that it enables us to relate our psychological judgments to clinically based theories and contribute to the possibility of more general theory building about the nature of the tyrant.

Several authors have made substantial contributions along these lines. Robert Tucker (1990, pp. 3–5), in his authoritative biographical study of Josef Stalin, suggested that Karen Horney's theory of neurosis can be used to explain his grandiosity and insecurities. Hershman and Lieb (1994) posited that Napoleon and most other tyrants suffer from a manic-depressive disorder. Robert Waite's (1977) important study of Adolf Hitler suggests that the German dictator suffered from a more serious disorder: the borderline personality syndrome with pathologic/narcissistic features that enabled him to manipulate without guilt (pp. xi–xviii, 356–359). Jerrold Post has argued in one presentation that Saddam Hussein is a malignant narcissist (1991) and in another article advanced the theory that most tyrants manifest a similar pathology (1993). Vamik Volkan (1982, p. 345) argued that many leaders are narcissistic but made a distinction between narcissist reparative and narcissist destructive leaders (Post, 1993, p. 117; Volkan, 1988). Kemal Ataturk was an example of a narcissist reparative leader, identifying with his

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[8] Ironically, Rosenbaum's conclusions, based on Lucy Davidowicz's (1975) work, depend on the same kinds of subtle proofs a psychoanalyst might use.

followers and advancing their causes as a part of his grandiose missions (Volkan & Itzkowitz, 1984). Narcissist destructive leaders, such as Hitler and Stalin, by way of contrast, are more inclined to project their own devalued self-image on other people and to attack them as a means of maintaining a precarious psychological stability.

Our task, in the rest of this paper, is to briefly explicate the various psychological models suggested above and to see which one provides the most comprehensive explanation of the leaders studied here.

Karen Horney and the Neurotic Paradigm

Karen Horney (1950) noted that the neurotic creates an idealized self-image as a cover for underlying feelings of unworthiness. This idealized self-image may vary according to the culture and life experiences of the individual involved. But whatever the content of his idealized self-portrait, the neurotic devotes psychic energies to the self-presentations and the maintenance of the supports that suggest he really is that perfect person. As the idealized self becomes more grandiose, he loses contact with his real feelings and thus the capacity for change and growth. The result is that his efforts are devoted to an unending quest to identify with his ideal self, and to win support for it. But even if he reaches some of his goals in the real world, he will never be satiated. At some level the individual has a dim realization that he does not really live up to his grandiose image. To defend the idealized self, he makes claims for recognition and deference, and is enraged when it is not forthcoming (Horney, 1950, pp. 17–24, 194–196, 295–296).

The applicability of Horney's theories is evident in the defensiveness and other indications of the insecurities that undergird the grandiosity of the tyrants studied here. Plutarch records that Dionysius I (430–367 B.C.), the tyrant of Syracuse, turned with rage on Plato when Plato noted that tyrants lack justice and are miserable. Later, he tried to have Plato killed on his return voyage to Greece, or at least sold into slavery (Plutarch, 1910, pp. 333–334). As Herodotus noted, the Persian king Cambyses sent his brother Smerdis back home from the field in Egypt after that brother had shown that he (Smerdis) was the only one who could draw the bow the Ethiopians sent the Persians. Soon afterward he had him murdered (Herodotus, 1987, p. 224). Roman emperors, as Gibbon has noted, manifested similar traits. Commodus of Rome (180–92 A.D.), a weak man who was corrupted by his courtiers and fearful after an attempt on his life, came to see every kind of distinction within the Roman Senate as a threat to himself (Gibbon, 1952, vol. 37, p. 36).

We have data on contemporary tyrants that permit a more complete analysis along the lines suggested above. Stalin clearly had a "basic inferiority complex," as Churchill's personal interpreter, who was present at meetings with Stalin for 6 years, noted (Tucker, 1973, pp. 438–439). The makeup of his personal retinue is further evidence of this insecurity. The rise of Beria can be at least partly ascribed

to Stalin's intense need for admiration, which Beria fed. Stalin's daughter Svetlana noted that Beria's shameless flattery caused old friends "to wince with embarrassment" (Alliluyeva, 1967, p. 137). Moreover, unlike most Georgians, Stalin was unable to accept any jokes about himself. Even his short stature was compensated for by wearing built-up shoes (Tucker, 1973, p. 438).

Any sort of criticism was a threat to the edifice of omniscience Stalin had created. According to his daughter, Stalin would undergo a "psychological metamorphosis" when he heard of anyone opposing him or saying negative things about him. "No matter how long and well he had known the person concerned, he would now put him down as an enemy. . . . At this point the past ceased to exist for him. 'So you've betrayed me,' some inner demon would whisper . . . 'I don't even know you any more' " (Alliluyeva, 1967, pp. 78–79).

Even persons who disagreed with Stalin on a point of theory or party history were subjected to vindictive responses. They had indirectly attacked his view of himself as an outstanding Marxist thinker (Tucker, 1973, pp. 444–447). Those who had played major roles in the Bolshevik revolution were particularly threatening to him. Unlike Hitler, Stalin had come to power in a party in which many of the other leaders saw themselves as his superiors. Indeed, Stalin's envy of all the old Bolshevik leaders may have been a large part of his motivation to destroy them. He even feared that the men he elevated might conspire against him. Jealous of any friendship that might develop among members of his entourage or the Politburo, he would either provoke a quarrel or separate them through transfers to new postings (Orlov, 1954, p. 258).

Hitler's basic insecurities were manifest in similar characteristics. With the adulation of the crowd, he could work himself up into an ecstatic frenzy. Still, he doubted himself. While rehearsing a speech, for example, he would ask his valet, "Do I look like the Führer? Do I really look like the Führer?" (Waite, 1977, p. 45). His inner circle was composed mostly of people to whom he could feel superior because of their weaker intelligence or other deficiencies that he could jeer at: Josef Goebbels had a club foot, his court photographer had a deformed back, Hermann Goering was a morphine addict, Martin Bormann an alcoholic, and his personal chauffeur the shortest among the 30 who applied (Waite, 1977, pp. 44–45).[9] Genuine intellectuals, who must have threatened his claims to superior knowledge, were sarcastically mocked (Schwaab, 1992, p. 37).

Like Stalin, he found any sort of defeat or criticism intolerable. In games such as bowls, he stopped playing when anyone else was winning (Waite, 1977, p. 44).

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[9] Albert Speer was the one major exception to this rule. Aristocratic and handsome, he was the ideal Aryan type as Hitler noted. Yet his relationship to Hitler can be understood in Kohut terms. He was Hitler's idealized other. And he was also willing to become Hitler's surrogate, undertaking (under Hitler's direction) the massive architectural reconstruction that had preoccupied Hitler since his early days in Vienna. Speer, in turn, was enthralled by his leader. Even when he opposed Hitler's decisions, as he did toward the end of the war when Hitler wanted to destroy Germany, Speer remained personally loyal (see Fest, 1974, p. 382; Waite, 1977, p. 376).

Once committed to a plan of action, he became enraged at those who blocked his efforts. When British Premier Neville Chamberlain informed him at Godesberg of the Czech mobilization, he leaped to his feet, his face red, which typically presaged an outburst (Ribbentrop, 1954, p. 30). On another occasion at Berlin, when a letter from Chamberlain relayed the Czech-Slovak rejection of Hitler's latest demands on that country, Hitler again lost his self-control. Leaping up, he shouted that the negotiations were pointless and rushed to the door. He returned, but became enraged again when his translator finished reading the letter (Schmidt, 1951, p. 103).

Throughout his life, Hitler blamed others for his own failures. When he failed to gain admission into the Viennese Academy of Art, he blamed the school's bureaucracy and spoke of traps being laid so as to ruin his career (Hitler, 1939, pp. 26–27; Kubizek, 1954, pp. 78–79, 116, 149; Waite, 1977, p. 44). In power, the responsibility for military defeats was placed on the purported betrayals by the Army, the SS, or the Nazi Party leadership. Immediately after the failure at Moscow, for example, Hitler turned on his generals, blaming them for the setback. The commander-in-chief of the army, Walter von Brauchtisch, was subjected to his rage and given orders that were impossible to execute, and was then removed from his post (Schwaab, 1992, p. 143). When a new offensive in the Caucasus began to bog down in 1942, the general in command was removed, and Hitler refused to dine with or even shake the hands of Generals Alfred Jodl and Franz Halder and Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel. In the final days of the war, Hitler was enraged that the Luftwaffe could not operate because of weather factors, seeing it as an excuse for not fighting and blaming the setbacks on the Western front on treachery by military commanders, whose decisions and troop deployments were seen as designed to cause defeat (Goebbels, 1978, pp. 198, 246; Speer, 1970, p. 239).

Although we have more limited data on Saddam Hussein, it is clear that he expects approval, even from those whom he might destroy. Shortly after he had marked several party leaders for death at the meeting on 22 July 1979, those who remained in the hall where the meeting was being held roared their approval of what he had just done. As a cousin declared, "everything that you did in the past was good and everything that you will do in the future is good" (Miller & Mylroie, 1990, p. 45).

Horney, in short, has provided a partial answer to our paradox. The coexistence in the tyrant of an idealized self-image and the underlying insecurity manifest in the search for external props for the idealized self is explained. Moreover, as her work suggests, real accomplishments do not heal the underlying fissures in the neurotic character. Victories may provide a temporary elation, but they cannot heal the underlying feelings of inferiority.

But her work does not answer two of our basic questions. Most neurotics have a conscience and the potential for guilt, which limits their choice of tactics. What is it that distinguishes tyrants from such individuals? Moreover, her work does not

provide us with a clear explanation of the reasons for the self-defeating behavior of so many tyrants.

The Manic-Depressive Paradigm

The manic depression hypothesis directs our attention to another possible aspect of the tyrant's behavior. Hershman and Lieb (1994) argued that "manic depression has been a critical factor in propelling some individuals to seek political power, to abuse it, and to become tyrants." "This clinical disorder," they contended, "is the source of many of the irrational characteristics of tyranny" (p. 10).

Certainly their work directs us to the mood swings that have characterized many contemporary tyrants. George Bernard Shaw and Milovan Djilas (the Yugoslav communist), for instance, spoke of Stalin's sense of humor and even his volubility. Yet Trotsky observed that Stalin was "moody to the point of capriciousness." A British translator noted how Stalin could shift from geniality to dour hostility when his wishes were opposed (Hershman & Lieb, 1994, pp. 160–161). Certainly he was deeply depressed after Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union (Tucker, 1990, p. 625). Hitler was subject to vacillations too. As a young man in Linz and Vienna, his one friend, August Kubizek, noted how he alternated between intense activity and fits of depression in which he would be unresponsive, holding imaginary dialogues and wandering about alone for days and nights. In power, Hitler alternated between euphoria at his successes and depression when checked. When Czechoslovakia was seized, Hitler was ebullient, but when there were reverses, he withdrew into depression. In the 1940s, within his inner circle, Hitler would switch from friendliness to rage if anyone mentioned the war or its effects (Hershman & Lieb, 1994, pp. 56–57, 78; Toland, 1976, pp. 742–743).

But Hershman and Lieb's net is far too broad. As they noted, many successful political leaders in history have displayed manic-depressive behavior, including Abraham Lincoln and Winston Churchill. Other major leaders, such as Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon, have also behaved in ways symptomatic of mania. Major artists and scientists have also shown such proclivities, such as Newton, Goethe, Beethoven, Balzac, Tolstoy, and van Gogh (Hershman & Lieb, 1994, pp. 10–11, 13). The problem with their interpretation, then, is that it does not allow us to distinguish between persons with mood swings who nevertheless have constructive ambitions, usually good contact with reality, and moral constraints on their behaviors, and those who lack such qualities. Certainly Lincoln and Churchill were not identical to Hitler, Stalin, and Hussein in terms of these considerations. In short, the breadth of this interpretive approach does not enable us to make important distinctions.

Borderline Personality and Malignant Narcissism

Otto Kernberg's early work on the borderline personality provides us with a more comprehensive perspective on the qualities that are often manifest in the tyrant. As in Horney's neurotic personality, there is a split in Kernberg's borderline personality between an idealized self and a despised self. But in contrast to Horney's characterization of the neurotic adaptation, the distinguishing characteristics of borderline narcissists are that they suffer from a severe superego pathology and an underlying potential for fragmentation. No constraints bound their search for glory. At base such an individual has no real attachment to others, and thus no capacity for empathy. Behind a surface that is very often charming, there is a coldness, a ruthlessness. In psychodynamic terms, generally, such a person depreciates those from whom he does not expect anything. He may, for a short time, idealize someone from whom narcissistic supplies are expected. Sometimes he may have positive feelings toward a person. But these feelings can evaporate when that person disappoints him. He simply forgets the attachment he once had. Such a person suffers from a continuous feeling of emptiness and fear of abandonment, along with a chronically unstable sense of self, as well as paranoia (for the borderline/narcissistic syndrome, see Kernberg, 1975, pp. 5–7, 17, 41, 126–146, 231–235, 256, 276).

The more recent DSM-IV criteria for the borderline personality, however, provide a portrait of a somewhat more impulsive person than Kernberg's characterization. He or she has a predilection for intense but unstable relationships, swinging between idealization and self-despising. There are also periods of intense reactivity of mood, and outbursts of uncontrollable temper (Livesley, 1995, p. 148).

Although we have evidence, as noted above, that many tyrants had volatile personalities, their ability to win a popular following and sustain themselves in power suggests that at least in the beginnings of their careers they had somewhat greater impulse control than the DSM-IV sees as characteristic of the borderline personality.

Perhaps other types of narcissistic personality typologies would give us a better portrait of their behaviors. All individuals with narcissistic personality disorders and related subtypes as defined in the DSM-IV and by the later writings of Kernberg (1992), Volkan (1988), and Post (1993) show grandiosity (as manifest in fantasies of unlimited power and success), vulnerability to criticism, and a lack of empathy for others (see Widiger et al., 1996, p. 746).

But as Kernberg, Volkan, and Post have suggested, one can distinguish between a relatively benign narcissism and a more antisocial type. Volkan (1988, pp. 196–216), for example, saw pure narcissism as a characteristic of many leaders. The reparative type, who is included in this category, is apt to frame his missions in ways that accord with the needs and fantasies of his followers and thus tie him to them in some meaningful way. The malignant narcissist, by way of contrast,

manifests not only the self-inflation of all narcissistic types, but also greater aggression and deficiency in his superego development (Post, 1993, p. 113). His antisocial behavior is manifest in aggression or sadism directed against others or against himself through suicidal and self-destructive behavior. He also has strong tendencies toward paranoia (Kernberg, 1992, p. 81; Post, 1993, pp. 102–104), that is, "delusions of conspiracy and victimization" that are apt to be well concealed from those around him (Robins & Post, 1997, p. 4).[10] The central defense of such a person, Volkan (1988, pp. 99–100, 201) argued, is splitting. Such a person maintains some sort of stability via a paranoid defense. He dichotomizes the world into good and evil elements, projecting his own dark side and vulnerabilities onto an external source, transforming an internal conflict into an external one. Thus, he is able to distance himself from an internal conflict by transforming that conflict into an external battle between himself as the representative of good and the scapegoat as the representative of evil.[11]

Another variant of the narcissistic syndrome—the antisocial personality—as set out in the DSM-IV manifests a similar lack of superego development. Such an individual is characterized not only by his lawbreaking and an alienation from all community values; he or she is inclined toward petty criminality, habits of deception, irritability, and reckless behavior (Livesley, 1995, pp. 105–107).[12]

The malignant narcissistic syndrome offers the best fit for the behavior of the tyrants studied here. Unlike the reparative narcissist, the malignant narcissist is not bound by a mission he shares with his followers. Rather, he manifests contempt not only for the law, but for the values of his followers as well. Unlike the antisocial personality, however, he does not specialize in minor criminality. As a would-be tyrant he works to create an environment, a social and ideological structure, in which the manifestations of his disorder—cruelty, paranoia, and what would normally be criminal behavior—become legitimized and justified behavior. This is facilitated in the early stages of the tyrant's career, during his climb to power,

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[10] As Robins and Post noted, such individuals are fearful, on inadequate or nonexistent grounds, that others are exploiting or harming them; that friends and associates are disloyal or untrustworthy; and that innocuous events or remarks are threats or attacks. Such a person manifests a defensive conviction of his own centrality in the world, a constant fear of loss of autonomy, the projection of his own painful feelings onto others, and delusional thinking (Robins & Post, 1997, pp. 3–4, 7–13).

[11] Post seems to have had the more beneficent narcissist in mind when he argued that the narcissist has a greater ability to repress and use other more sophisticated defenses than the sociopath, and that he may perceive himself as highly principled, although those principles can change as circumstances change: "What is good for him is good for the country" (Post, 1993, pp. 104, 110).

[12] For an earlier critique of the DSM criteria for the antisocial personality and the overreliance on criminal and clinical settings, see Livesley (1995, p. 117). Kernberg saw the malignant narcissist as a type situated between the pure and more benign narcissist and the antisocial personality. The critical difference of the malignant narcissist from the antisocial personality is the possibility of some fragments of remorse and guilt in the malignant narcissist (Kernberg, 1992, pp. 75, 76). For some primitive remnants of guilt in a tyrant, see Gibbon (1952, vol. 37, pp. 54–55) on the Roman emperor Caracalla (188–217 A.D.) and Hitler's comment that "the Jew is always within us" (Waite, 1977, p. 363).

by the adoption of political and social positions that are shared by other revolutionaries but are contrary to the prevailing values. Thus, Stalin's opposition to the Tsars and the capitalists of the world, Hitler's opposition to the "decadence" of the Weimar republic and the putative power of the Jews, and Saddam's promotion of pan-Arabism—each of these became a ground for making lawbreaking and antisocial behavior into principled resistance. Once power is attained, however, a complete system is created (in legal and political terms) that transforms the intrinsically antisocial and criminal behavior of the tyrant and his associates into measures necessary for the preservation of the polity against internal and external enemies. When the tyrant nears his zenith, the criminality takes on massive proportions, as in Stalin's purges or Hitler's "Final Solution." In short, as Robins and Post have noted, "when a paranoid leader becomes chief of state, his paranoia infects the nation" (Robins & Post, 1997, p. 244).[13]

The relevance of the malignant narcissistic model for the tyrants studied here is evident in the grandiosity, the underlying sense of inferiority, the sadism, and the lack of scruples in dealing with perceived threats to their position that has been delineated above. But the malignant narcissistic model also directs our attention to other matters to consider here: tyrants' possible lack of a genuine commitment to their comrades in arms and the values they espouse, as well as a deep-seated proclivity to split the world in two, assigning all the darker traits of their own personalities to external enemies. The latter can develop into a full-grown paranoia, as we discuss below.

Stalin's roots in his world were shallow in important respects.[14] He appears not to have been grounded in any ideology, as was evident in his ability to shift camps and outmaneuver the other old Bolsheviks in the mid-1920s. His extreme lack of empathic ties is evident in his destruction of people who had been in his inner circle. His first targets in his great purges of the 1930s—Nikolai Bukharin, Sergei Kirov, Sergo Ordzhonikidze—were "friends" who had joined his family in picnics and cruises (Alliluyeva, 1967, pp. 31, 138–140). Even family members could be destroyed without evident remorse. He may have been close to his second wife, Nadya, for some time. But after she died in 1932, apparently by her own hand, Stalin effaced all traces of her with his usual methodicalness. Her possessions and effects were removed from the Kremlin, and according to Svetlana, Stalin did not attend the funeral. Those members of the household who had known and loved her began to be displaced. Within 5 years of Nadya's death, most of her close relatives

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[13] As Khrushchev recalled, Stalin "instilled in . . . us all the suspicion that we were all surrounded by enemies" (Khrushchev, 1970, p. 299). Cambodia under Pol Pot provides an even more chilling example of how a peaceful, "romantic, artistic, and relaxed" population can become the victim of such a leader. The result was a holocaust that killed one-seventh of the Cambodian population and victimized millions of others (Robins & Post, 1997, pp. 244, 247, 251–252, 265).

[14] Erich Fromm argued that destructiveness grows out of a failure to establish roots in the world and in relationships. Indeed, an individual's "very sanity depends on" such ties. If connections to others are not successfully established, the result may be a "craving to destroy all others" (Fromm, 1973, pp. 232–233).

or intimates had been destroyed (Alliluyeva, 1967, pp. 122–123; for arrests of family members, see Alliluyeva, 1967, pp. 77–78, 196; for questions about Nadya's death, see Hershman & Lieb, 1994, pp. 104, 167; Orlov, 1954, pp. 314–315).

For a time, Stalin took pleasure in his young daughter, Svetlana, playing games with her, writing her amusing little notes (Alliluyeva, 1967, p. 97). But when she became a young woman, he subjected her to a variety of torments. For example, during a dinner with Soviet marshals after the Second World War, Stalin said, apropos of his daughter and in her presence, "I bet you don't know who's fucking her now" (Hershman & Lieb, 1994, p. 165; Khrushchev, 1970, pp. 289-290). Yakov, his son from his first marriage, was allowed to die after the Germans captured him early in their invasion of Russia. Holding that Yakov had betrayed him by being captured, Stalin turned down a German offer to exchange him for Germans in Russian hands. Yakov's Jewish wife was arrested by the NKVD as having abetted the betrayal (Alliluyeva, 1969, p. 370). In short, Stalin's ability to psychologically cut himself off from individuals who had once seemed to be close to him was one of the sources of his cruelty.

Hitler's relationships, too, suggest that he could form no lasting attachments. The pattern was evident in his "friendship" as an adolescent with August Kubizek. In a very one-sided relationship, Hitler took up all of Kubizek's free time, subjecting him to long speeches on subjects that Kubizek found of no interest. But when Kubizek had less free time for his friend, Hitler abruptly ended their relationship. Disappearing from the room they had shared in Vienna, Hitler left no explanation or address. It was only after many years that Kubizek learned that Hitler had moved to cheaper quarters at a hostel, also in Vienna. In his later life Hitler made no real friends. Finding solitude intolerable, he would find ways of surrounding himself with people (Kubizek, 1954, pp. xi, 11–12, 29, 106, 201–204). But in his intimate circle, Hitler was emotionally isolated. Albert Speer, one of the persons who spent "endless time" with the Führer, "never really knew him." Indeed, Speer noted that he had never met anyone so intent on hiding his feelings (Speer, 1970, pp. 100, 302).

Hitler, too, was unanchored in any sort of conventional morality. Indeed, in *Mein Kampf*, he made this scorn for moral standards explicit. The existence of a conscience was a Jewish trait, he said, something that weakens one and should be eradicated (Waite, 1977, p. 16). Indeed, in addition to the sadism noted above, he enjoyed deception. When Hitler heard about the casket presented to Ribbentrop in 1943, filled with all the treaties he had concluded and then ignored, Hitler laughed until tears came to his eyes (Speer, 1970, p. 180). The closer he got to someone, he bragged on another occasion, "the more he lied" (Waite, 1977, p. 384).

Both men also showed certain paranoid traits. For Stalin, the cause of progress and the good of the people was identified with the Communist Party, of which he became the final authority. Evil was laid at the door of the external enemy—the capitalist classes and the states they controlled that encircled the Soviet Union. The capitalists would clearly mobilize to prevent the new order he represented from

extending its influence. They would never accept the victories he achieved within the Soviet Union and would do their best to destroy what he had accomplished. Even internal enemies—other Bolsheviks who would compete with him for power, the kulaks, the military—could thus be explained away. They were simply representatives of the capitalist class within his own state (Stalin, 1942, 1971).

For Hitler too, paranoia had long been one of his major defenses. As evident in his writing in *Mein Kampf* (1939, pp. 412–414, 425–455), his image of the Jews provided him with a model for his own aspirations as well as a rationale for his own aggression. Through their unique ability to maintain a national identity through the ages, as he saw it, the Jews had developed a unified program as well as an agenda that sought domination of the world. Through their control of the mass media, the universities, democratic political parties, and other bourgeois institutions, they controlled the so-called democracies of the world as well as the Soviet Union. As he wrote while in prison in 1923, "one can only understand the Jews when one realizes their final purpose: to master the world and then destroy it . . . while they pretend to raise mankind up, actually they contrive to drive mankind to despair, insanity, and destruction" (Hershman & Lieb, 1994, p. 66).

In a kind of mirror image of what he saw as the goals of the Jews, Hitler saw himself as leading a purified Aryan race in a grand battle to destroy them. As the Führer, he would place his stamp on all Jews in Germany. His ultimate goal was the complete destruction of the supposed Jewish base in the Soviet Union.[15]

Not only did Hitler use the purported Jewish designs on the world to justify his own unlimited ambitions, he found in their existence a means of explaining his own vulnerabilities. In *Mein Kampf* he ascribed his anti-Semitism to his discovery of the putative Jewish control of prostitution, the worlds of art and music, and the liberal press. Later, he told Frau Hanfstaengl that his anti-Semitism was "a personal thing," and he blamed his failure as a painter on the Jewish control of the art world, according to his sister, Paula. There is also some evidence that he may have blamed the suffering of his mother's last illness on a Jewish Dr. Bloch who prescribed a controversial treatment for her cancer (Toland, 1976, pp. 45–46). Moreover, his hatred of the Jews may have been a reaction to his own uncertain ancestry in the anti-Semitic world in which he traveled (Waite, 1977, pp. 126–130).

Certainly Hitler projected onto the Jews his own proclivities for lying, slander, and other devious behavior (Hitler, 1939, p. 960). Moreover, his ragings about Jewish debauchery are indicative of his own sexual fantasies: "Bow legged, disgusting Jewish bastards," he proclaimed in *Mein Kampf*, were seducing hundreds of thousands of girls. Moreover, when a "black-haired Jew boy" ambushes and "defiles" a girl, he is actually trying to destroy the "racial foundation" of the host people whom the Jews plan to enslave. In his debauchery, he is not hesitant

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[15]For Hitler on purifying the race and the Marxism-Jewish connection, see *Mein Kampf* (1939, pp. 66, 219, 608–609, 614–615, 960); see also Cameron and Stevens (1973, pp. 72, 179), Waite (1977, pp. 365–367), and Schwaab (1992, pp. 59–72) for the dynamics of his fear of the Jews.

about "pulling down the barriers of blood and race . . . on a large scale" (Hitler, 1939, p. 448; Schwaab, 1992, p. 85).

Saddam Hussein too used this defense, anticipating enemy attacks from those he suspected long before his targets themselves realized that they were Hussein's enemies. Shortly after assuming the presidency in the summer of 1979, he told a visitor, "I know that there are scores of people plotting to kill me. . . . However, I am far more clever than they are. I know they are conspiring to kill me long before they actually start planning to do it. This enables me to get them before they have the faintest chance of striking at me." Indeed, he seemed to sense that his own behavior led others to hate him, thus giving some substance to such projections. While visiting Saudi Arabia's King Fahd some years ago, Hussein used his little finger as a visual aid in explaining how others feel about him. "If I ever fall you won't find this much of my body left. People will cut it to pieces" (Karsh & Rautsi, 1991, p. 2; "Saddam Predicted Bloody Fate if Ousted," 1991).

Absolute Power and the Self-Destructive Cycle

Power as a Narcotic

For those with the malignant narcissistic disorders noted above, the achievement of absolute power can act as a kind of narcotic. As Volkan (1980) has noted, the narcissistic leader in certain historical circumstances may be able to structure an external world that supports his grandiose claims (pp. 138–139). Unlike the ordinary narcissist who experiences repeated frustration of his grandiose claims in a world he does not control, the tyrant can minimize his frustrations and thus the experiences that can lead to depression. In short, he can construct a world that provides him with temporary relief from his internal conflicts. But, as discussed below, this structuring has long-term consequences that are apt to prove detrimental to his psychic balance.

The ways in which the tyrant uses his power in this manner can be specified as follows: First, his control over his political environment may be used to win support for the grandiose visions of self. He can command an unusual deference of those in his inner circle and orchestrate worship. Indeed, his claims of omnipotence are attractive to "ideal hungry" people (Post, 1993, p. 116)[16] who feel insecure in their own lives and pull them to him as adherents of the cause he defines. This, combined with expertise and cunning, may lead to early impressive successes. Second, his power can be used to eliminate his enemies and prevent any criticism from being voiced. Even embarrassments from his past can be eradicated. Third,

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[16] Using theories from Heinz Kohut, Post (1993) noted that tyrants' followers are apt to need to immerse themselves in the grandiose leader as a means of achieving their own grandiose goals. The leader, for his part, needs his followers as a mirror to reinforce his elevated notions of himself (pp. 116–117).

even loneliness can be countermanded by commands for company at any time of the night or day.

The tyrant's propensity to buttress his exalted self-image and eliminate his critics via control over his environment has been noted above. In addition, that power can be used to eradicate a past filled with crimes and other shameful acts via the construction of his own history. The Roman emperor Maximin, for example, was conscious of the marked contrast between his own barbarian origins, rough appearance, and lack of culture and the sophistication of some of his associates. Those who had supported him in his climb but knew of his original obscurity were put to death (Gibbon, 1952, vol. 37, p. 70). Among contemporary tyrants, Stalin eradicated almost everyone who knew him during his days in Georgia, when he was plotting and scheming to attain power and acting in ways incompatible with his self-image of infallibility. Later he ordered the elimination from written histories and documents of the names of individuals who had run afoul of him (Cohen, 1997, p. 7). Although Hitler did not as systematically destroy persons who might tell embarrassing tales about him, he did take steps to close inquiry into the death, under questionable circumstances, of his niece and possible mistress Geli Raubal. He ordered her room to be kept locked up and allowed no one to mention her name. Later, in 1938, he ordered the destruction of the town of Dollersheim in Austria, where his father Alois had been born and registered without his own father's name on the document, thus making Hitler's father illegitimate (for Raubal's death, see Toland, 1976, pp. 252–255; Waite, 1977, pp. 226–228; for the destruction of Dollersheim and questions of Alois Hitler's paternity, see Waite, 1977, pp. 126–130).

As for countermanding loneliness, the use of power to provide oneself with company has been well documented in the cases of Stalin and Hitler. Thus Stalin, for example, depended on his retinue of sycophantic associates for company, summoning them upon waking and keeping them on the flimsiest grounds well into the early hours of the morning (Khrushchev, 1970, pp. 133, 297, 300). Svetlana Alliluyeva also recalled how, in the period after the war, the whole of the Politburo dined with Stalin almost every night. During a visit to Sochi in 1947, she found the whole group coming to dinner, and spent three or four boring and tiring hours listening to the banal and repetitive conversation, with little connection to what was happening in the world, and the session continuing late into the night. Even in her last visit to her father at the end of 1952, she found the same set of cronies, repeating the same jokes and asides she had been hearing for years (Alliluyeva, 1967, pp. 21, 208). Hitler had a similar routine of dinner late in the evening with his retinue, followed almost always by movies and talking until any time from three to six in the morning. Hitler dominated the conversation with nightly monologues on subjects such as diet and the training of dogs, as well as the reiteration of his views on history, science, and culture (Speer, 1970, pp. 128–131).

The Vicious Cycle

Although absolute power may temporarily alleviate the tyrant's self-doubts, power of this sort also feeds the self-defeating behavior we have delineated above. As Plato observed, the tyrant is very likely to get caught up in a cycle of disintegration. One injustice breeds another and the tyrant becomes increasingly isolated from the people he would lead. Feeling endangered, he acts with greater and greater impulsivity. Eventually he ends up "mad" (Plato, 1941, pp. 325–327).

From a contemporary psychological perspective, the disintegration may be postulated in the following terms. First, the tyrant's manipulation of his environment is never completely satisfying to him. Adulation that is orchestrated cannot heal his underlying lack of self-esteem. Indeed, the acts the tyrant performs in coming to power increase his feelings of fear and his isolation from other human beings. Having done so much evil, often in contrast to his benignly authoritative public self, he cannot but feel fraudulent and thus profoundly alone. As he engages in new cruelties and cuts himself off from former friends and supporters, the tyrant feels more and more fraudulent, more and more alone. Even the adulation of the crowds does little for him, for they respond only to his facade, not what he really is. Certainly he will be aware that his activities have created many who wish to take their revenge on him.

Evidence for this proposition is manifest in the behavior of Stalin and Hitler in their later careers. The emptiness that popular support meant for them is manifest in their attitude toward the crowds that adored them. Stalin, as his daughter noted, came to a point where he would grimace when cheering crowds greeted him at train stations. By 1947 they were keeping platforms empty of all but essential railway personnel when he was passing by (Alliluyeva, 1967, p. 205). After the fall of 1951, he didn't leave Moscow, staying at his dacha in Kuntsevo almost all the time (Alliluyeva, 1967, pp. 195, 201).

Hitler, too, saw that he had few real friends. Even before the war, Hitler was predicting that he would be forgotten after his retirement, and that he could not count on any former associates visiting him. As he told Albert Speer, "I'll take no one with me. [Except] Fräulein Braun and my dog. I'll be lonely. For why would anyone stay voluntarily with me for any length of time?" (Speer, 1970, pp. 99–100).

Over time, he became increasingly isolated from his public. In his earlier years, as Speer noted, Hitler showed himself at the window of his train whenever it stopped. By the end of 1942, however, he found such contacts with the outside world unpalatable, and he would have the blinds drawn on the side of the train facing the station (Speer, 1970, p. 245). Goebbels (1978) also noted Hitler's unwillingness to address the German people in the final months of the war (p. 279).

Other factors contribute to the tendency of the tyrant to become, over time, more erratic, less grounded in political reality. In the climb toward power, the would-be tyrant still has to work within the framework of certain external constraints. He has to pay homage to conventional values and attend to the interests

and needs of others in power who can facilitate or impede his moves toward absolute power. He acts, in short, within a somewhat restrictive external framework. The environment, as it were, provides a kind of boundary for the self. His behavior thus is relatively reality oriented, and external constraints limit his acting out of fantasies, capping as it were the swirling mass of impulses underneath the surface.

Once he has consolidated his position, however, a tyrant is apt to act out, with apparent impunity, the grandiose fantasies other people usually constrain. Secure in his political base and intoxicated by his early successes, the tyrant is apt to come to a point where he no longer thinks he needs to be careful and becomes convinced that he can act out his most extreme fantasies. As Post noted, the very successes of the malignant narcissist in a position of supreme power reinforce his narcissistic "sense of omnipotence and . . . invulnerability," which leads to a certainty that nothing can go wrong with his plans (Post, 1993, p. 103). Surrounded by flatterers, he is not apt to receive new information regarding realistic limits to which he should pay attention (Post, 1993, p. 103).

But fantasies, grounded as they are on transient wishes and fears, provide poor guides to action. They are apt to lead a tyrant into making his grandiose goals obvious in statements as well as in policy choices in which the means are not well suited to the ends. But as his extraordinary ambitions become increasingly manifest, politically significant others are apt to form alliances against him. Those who are the object of his ambitions may organize to counter his designs against them (as the Allies did against Hitler in the Second World War). Even those who share his goals are apt to become concerned at his inability to see and deal with barriers in the external world to their accomplishments (as several generals and other high officers in the German military did in 1944).

A manifest impulsivity is apt to accompany the tyrant's acting out of his fantasies. Because Stalin destroyed almost everyone who knew him in his climb to power, and left no memoirs, we know little about the nature of his early fantasy life. But we do have testimony as to Stalin's capriciousness at the behavioral level in his later years. He would issue orders at any time of day or night, even during banquets or other social occasions. Such sudden impulses decided large-scale public projects such as the building of canals, or momentous political decisions such as the postwar partition of Germany. Associates would be suddenly summoned, and meetings would be ended abruptly or the agenda switched at the whim of Stalin. Without regular meetings of the governing bodies, Khrushchev noted, "the government virtually ceased to function." Stalin often postponed for months dealing with critical problems that needed to be solved urgently (Khrushchev, 1970, p. 297).

We can see these same trends even more clearly in Hitler's career. His proclivities toward fantasy were evident in his earlier years in Vienna. Convinced on one occasion that he would win the lottery, he began to build elaborate fantasies of how he would spend his winnings. In the same period Hitler built up an elaborate

fantasy of courtship and marriage with a girl, Stephanie, he saw on the street yet never dared to even approach. Plays, and even an opera based on the outline of one planned by Wagner, were begun and then abandoned (Kubizek, 1954, pp. 38–49, 59, 131–133, 146–153). Hitler himself confessed his predilection for fantasy, once telling his doctors that he suffered from "tormenting self-deception" (Waite, 1977, p. 38).

During his Vienna years Hitler shared these fantasies with at least one friend—August Kubizek. Yet he seems to have never risked clear defeats by actually proposing to Stephanie or completing his manuscripts and submitting them to potential producers or publishers. But in 1923 in the publication of *Mein Kampf*, he gave a public form to his grandiose dreams of becoming a Führer of an Aryan race that would create the greatest empire known in the modern world. In power, he began to act on the most extreme fantasies. By the mid-1930s his dream that he could create a new Germany in which he controlled every aspect of German life was secured to a great extent. His subsequent conquests of Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, France, Denmark, Norway, and Belgium seemed to offer the proof that he could create the world empire of his imagination. Indeed, the illusion, offered in *Mein Kampf* (1939, pp. 38, 908), that the British were actually potential allies of Germany may have undergirded his recklessness in the opening of the Eastern front while still formally at war with Great Britain. It may also have contributed to his reluctance to destroy the remaining British troops at Dunkirk (Hitler, 1939, p. 908).[17]

Gradually, Hitler lost all sense of limits: His failure to furnish the German Army with proper clothing for the cold months in the Russian campaign was based on his delusion that he could achieve in Russia, as he had in the West, a blitzkrieg type of victory. Indeed, even the Russian invasion was envisaged as the first step in yet a more grandiose plan. In February 1941 he ordered preparations for the conquest of India, with his armies going through Russia and Iran and North Africa. He also began to envision the subjugation of America through domestic unrest and revolts. Eventually he would annex it and convert it into a German-speaking nation. His ultimate project was to recreate humanity (Hershman & Lieb, 1994, p. 183; Toland, 1976, p. 651).

As he encountered increasing difficulties in the Soviet Union and elsewhere, Hitler engaged in ever wilder fantasies. At times he thought Churchill would join Germany to fight Russia, and that British prisoners-of-war would voluntarily join the struggle. The death of Roosevelt, as he saw it, meant that Germany was saved. As Berlin was being closed in from the West and the East, he even thought the Russians were about to collapse. At the same time he was convinced that a disenchanted Stalin would open negotiations with Germany first. At the end Hitler

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[17] For testimony that Hitler regarded as possible an alliance with the British, and that they should be preserved as fellow Teutons, see Ribbentrop (1954, pp. xxi, 50), Speer (1970, pp. 71, 165), and Schellenberg (1956, p. 123).

was still making plans for massive military action, with large numbers of nonexistent, fully equipped troops reinforcing the front lines (Goebbels, 1978, pp. 43, 199, 275; Koller, 1949, p. 25; Waite, 1977, p. 38).

At the behavioral level, Hitler's capriciousness increased as he acted out his most extreme fantasies. As the Russian campaign bogged down, Hitler became easily enraged and was unpredictable in what he would say and do. His decisions to drive through the Caucasus and otherwise divert his attack on Stalingrad in the summer of 1942 led to a rift with his generals. General Halder commented that his decisions were "the product of a violent nature following its momentary impulses." His unpredictability is also shown by his sudden order to Himmler to kill all prisoners, an order Himmler did not obey (Halder, 1949, pp. 55–57). Speer ascribed Hitler's misconceptions at this time to his unrealistic ways of working and thinking. Loath to use even the information available to him, he relied instead on his inspirations, which were shaped by his deep contempt for and underestimation of other people (Speer, 1970, pp. 165, 230).

As he encountered major obstacles, denial became one of his defensive maneuvers. During mealtimes he would deliver monologues on the same subjects, such as his early days in Vienna or history, repeating the same views over and over again to his circle. Practically no mention was allowed of current events and the military situation. Political advisors, when they did talk of such matters, told him what he wanted to hear. Thus, Goering rejected news dispatches of the heavy bombing of Cologne, branding them as lies and upbraiding the Gauleiter of Cologne for reporting "such fantasies" to Hitler. Hitler himself went into a rage at high estimates of Russian tank production, forbidding General Halder to produce such "idiotic nonsense" (Heston & Heston, 1979, p. 39; Speer, 1970, p. 279; Toland, 1976, p. 734). From the fall of 1942 onward, it became almost unthinkable to contradict Hitler on important issues. Hitler would brook no objections from his entourage. As his press officer, Otto Dietrich, noted, Hitler had created in imagination "a vast delusional world" over which his egotism could rule. As the final debacle became more and more inevitable, the more inflexible he became (Hershman & Lieb, 1994, p. 179; Speer, 1970, pp. 243, 292). For some time between the spring of 1942 and the summer of 1943 Hitler was downcast, evidently realizing he was in difficult straits. But after that there was a change in him, and he came to rely on the illusion of a final triumph. From then on Speer hardly ever heard Hitler refer to the setbacks that began to overwhelm his plans (Speer, 1970, p. 292).

The consequences of acting out are apt to lead the tyrant into an increasing reliance on paranoiac defenses. For him, as for others, the ability to recognize enemies is a requisite of survival (Volkan, 1988). But the tyrant is apt to create enemies where there had been none. He needs enemies upon whom he can externalize his inner conflicts. And as he attacks, often engaging in massive cruelties, he contributes to the creation of the very enemies that initially were in

his imagination. In a seeming confirmation of his paranoia, those the tyrant has abused become actual enemies.[18]

We see this tendency in Stalin's use of a paranoid defense over time.[19] Gradually he elaborated his enemies list so as to encompass more and more people. At first he saw threats from those who competed with him for power. Then from the kulaks and others who resisted his grandiose plans for collectivizing agriculture. Then from the military and others at home who might oppose his military policies. Unable to trust anyone at all, he even turned on his supporters: comrades who had fought alongside him and shared his exile in Siberia, and old Bolsheviks who had retired and were not threats in any way (Hershman & Lieb, 1994, p. 109).[20] Even the Russian people were seen as threats, and he had to kill them by the tens of millions to maintain the party's purity.

Yet, for all his paranoia, Stalin still could not see clearly who his real enemies might be. In the late 1930s Stalin came to think he could ally with Hitler to attain dominion over the world. In signing the non-aggression pact with Germany, he ignored all the evidence in *Mein Kampf* that Hitler saw the Soviet Union as his major enemy and that Hitler possessed the cunning and a value system that would enable him to take advantage of Stalin. Within his own entourage, he lost his capacity to discern the loyal from the disloyal. As Khrushchev (1970) suggested, he distrusted other members of the Politburo: Sometimes Stalin would "glare at you and say 'Why don't you look me in the eye today? Why are you averting your eyes from mine?' " (p. 254). On one occasion, he decided that one of his most loyal servants, Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov, was an American agent. While in the United States, Molotov had traveled from Washington to New York by train. Convinced that Molotov must have used a private car, Stalin fantasized that Molotov could have afforded such a car only by selling out to the Americans. Eventually Molotov was cleared, but Stalin continued to hold him guilty of something, sending his wife to prison, and plotting to kill him before his own death put an end to the plan. Even the doctors who treated him were seen as part of a plot to get him. Shortly before his death, Stalin came to believe that the distinguished medical specialists who had been treating the Soviet elite were actually Western spies who had over the years killed important patients, including several military

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[18] The tyrant's selection of enemies, of course, may have some basis in the prevailing ideology, as well as the political situation inside and outside his nation. Thus, the targeting of Jews by Hitler was effective because there were already anti-Semitic sentiments in large segments of the population. And Stalin did have opposition from capitalists inside and outside Russia, as well as from some of his former allies as they came to see his true colors. But the tyrant magnifies such "threats," seeing enemies everywhere.

[19] Post and Robins argued that Stalin's age and physical deterioration in his final years also contributed to the "full-blown paranoia." For him, "the border between prudent overreaction and psychotic delusions" became tenuous (Post & Robins, 1993, pp. 54–55).

[20] For Stalin's attacks on rivals, kulaks, and others, see Stalin, 1942, p. 168; 1971, pp. 121–129, 145, 169–181, 214–215, 233, 243, 281, 293, 297.

leaders, who had actually died on Stalin's orders (Khrushchev, 1970, pp. 283–287; see also pp. 559–618).

Stalin's extreme distrust of those in his entourage was apparent even at the very end, for he seemed to hold those around him responsible for his approaching death. Svetlana Alliluyeva vividly described how, just before he died, he suddenly opened his eyes and looked at those in the room. "It was a terrible glance, insane or perhaps angry and full of the fear of death." Then, in a gesture Alliluyeva found awesome, he "suddenly lifted his left hand as though he were pointing to something above and bringing down a curse on us all. The gesture was incomprehensible and full of menace, and no one could say to whom or at what it might be directed." Stalin died immediately afterward (Alliluyeva, 1967, p. 10).

Like Stalin, Hitler's paranoid defenses were elaborated over time, but were only partially successful in dealing with his own feelings of self-hatred. At times, he consciously identified with the enemy. "Jewishness," as he saw it, was "an evil within himself, a poison to be purged, a demon to be exorcised." But, he admitted on occasion, "the Jew is always within us" (Waite, 1977). Moreover, his idealization of the German people was muddied with the contempt he felt for the German masses. Even in *Mein Kampf* Hitler noted how childlike were the German people, and thus vulnerable to manipulation (Hitler, 1939, pp. 56, 232).

As Hitler faced the demolition of his dreams of a Third Reich, his ability to separate the good Aryan Germans from the bad Jews and other inferior people collapsed. True, he maintained his hatred of the Jews to the end.[21] But he also turned his rage against the entire German nation: "Germany is not worthy of me; let her perish" (Hershman & Lieb, 1994, p. 187; Waite, 1977, p. 392). As his press secretary Otto Dietrich said, "He asked the impossible of them, and when they did not meet his standards he said they had no right to life" (Hershman & Lieb, 1994, pp. 186–187).

Indeed, the sacrifices he demanded from the German people as the war ended represented his vengeance against them for failing him. He had no concern for German soldiers lost on the battlefield. As the Allies closed in on Berlin, he wanted churches, schools, hospitals, livestock, marriage records, and almost anything else that occurred to him to be destroyed. In April 1945 he wanted the entire leadership of the Luftwaffe to be summarily hanged. He considered bringing about the destruction of German cities by announcing the execution of all Royal Air Force war prisoners, so that there would be massive bombing in reprisal. He may also have given orders for all wounded German soldiers to be killed. His aim became the destruction of Germany in the greatest *Götterdämmerung* of history. As Albert Speer said about Hitler's obsession with architecture: "Long before the end I knew that Hitler was not destroying to build, he was building to destroy." But it is possible

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[21] In his last statement dictated shortly before he committed suicide, Hitler asked his nation to "demonstrate merciless resistance to the poison of mankind: International Jewry" (Schwaab, 1992, p. 59).

that he had a dim glimpse of his aim from the beginning, as suggested by a 1932 comment about how "we are the last people who will make history in Germany" (Waite, 1977, pp. 33, 410, 414).

Saddam Hussein's paranoid tendencies have been less well documented than Stalin's and Hitler's, but some of his behavior is suggestive. His moving from place to place was in part a realistic adaptation to U.S. attempts after his invasion of Kuwait to assassinate him. But even when his relations with the U.S. government were good, he exhibited certain paranoid characteristics. Thus, before his invasion of Kuwait, according to Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz, Hussein was convinced the Americans were using Kuwait to plot against him. At the same time he thought paradoxically that they were willing for him to invade Kuwait (Aburish, 2000, p. 297).[22] Furthermore, we have indirect evidence of his tendency to see even political and family intimates as threats to him in the people who have died or disappeared. These include the war hero General Maher Abdul Rashi (his son's father-in-law), Defense Minister Adnan Khairallah (a first cousin and Hussein's closest friend), as well as other military commanders in the Iran-Iraq war, his two sons-in-law, and some of their female relatives with their children (Aburish, 2000, pp. 337–339; Karsh, 1990, pp. 39–40; Miller & Mylroie, 1990, p. 55).

Conclusions

The foregoing analysis suggests that a *realpolitik* perspective does not provide us with an adequate analysis of the typical tyrant. Machiavelli's ultimately flexible power seeker—a man without a nature—does not exist. The person who is completely ruthless in the struggle for power is not apt to act moderately when that is to his advantage. Such an individual, given certain political skills, is apt to have an advantage in coming to power in anarchic or otherwise troubled situations. His self-idealization and apparent self-confidence are attractive to a people who are beset with troubles, and his ability to act without the constraints of a strong moral conscience gives him an advantage in raw struggle for power. Securing absolute power, moreover, meets some of his psychological needs. With his position and new instruments of control, he can orchestrate support of his idealized self-image and secure "friends" and punish "enemies" as he sees fit.

But absolute power, paradoxically, is apt to result in even more extreme behavior. Even a malignant narcissist, in the climb to power, operates within certain external political constraints. But once he has attained absolute power, he can act out the grandiose fantasies that he had hitherto kept in some check. Fantasies, however, are not good guides to action. The individual under their pull is apt to overestimate his capabilities, fail to appreciate realistic obstacles in the external environment, and act in increasingly chaotic ways. As his cruelties and apparent

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[22] Aziz made these comments to an unidentified French politician negotiating with the Iraqis (Aburish, 2000, p. 297).

erratic behaviors expand, he creates new enemies. Eventually, as he engages in ever more extreme behavior, his major psychological defense—paranoia—breaks down.

The particular finale to the tyrant's story, however, will depend on the political structure in which he operates and the vicissitudes of fortune. If his extreme behavior leads to the creation of opposing alliances, new boundaries may keep his potential for fragmentation in check. But if he has undertaken a path that permits no face-saving exit, he may take a route that risks the structures he has built. Caught in a maelstrom of conflicting wishes and emotions and undertaking adventures for which there is no realistic productive end, the individual in such circumstances may seek some sort of way out. For those confronting such a leader, efforts should be made to maintain clear, firm, but non-provocative boundaries. Compromise with him is likely only to whet the appetite. But confrontations that humiliate him could lead to behavior that is destructive both to him and those threatening him. Short of keeping such a person from ever coming to power, the creation of countervailing constraints that are both clear and impersonally used may be the best alternative available.

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